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VOC FOR IOP/FN

BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0188
MARK MCGUIRE

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FOCUS: GENERAL OLUSEGUN OBASANJO

ANNCR:

NIGERIA'S SUPREME MILITARY COUNCIL HAS SELECTED LIEUTENANT GENERAL OLUSEGUN OBASANJO TO BE THE NEW HEAD OF STATE. THE ACTION CAME AFTER FRIDAY'S ASSASSINATION OF GENERAL MURTALA MUHAMMED IN AN UNSUCCESSFUL COUP ATTEMPT. VOA'S MARK MCGUIRE HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT ON NIGERIA'S NEW LEADER:

VOICE:

GENERAL OBASANJO FIRST CAME TO INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION SHORTLY BEFORE THE END OF THE BIAFRAN SECESSION. HE TOOK COMMAND OF NIGERIA'S THIRD MARINE COMMANDO DIVISION IN MAY NINETEEN SIXTY-NINE, AND UNDER HIS COMMAND, IT BROKE THROUGH BIAFRAN LINES AND FORCED THE SURRENDER IN JANUARY, NINETEEN SEVENTY.

OLUSEGUN OBASANJO WAS BORN ONE HUNDRED KILOMETERS NORTH OF LAGOS IN ABEOKUTA ON MARCH FIFTH, NINETEEN THIRTY-SEVEN. HIS ENTIRE ADULT LIFE HAS BEEN SPENT IN THE MILITARY. HE ATTENDED MILITARY SCHOOL IN GHANA AND WAS COMMISSIONED IN THE NIGERIAN ARMY IN NINETEEN FIFTY-EIGHT. THE FOLLOWING YEAR HE SERVED WITH NIGERIA'S FIFTH BATTALION IN WHAT WAS THEN THE BELGIAN CONGO. AFTER MORE MILITARY TRAINING IN BRITAIN, HE ATTENDED STAFF COLLEGE IN INDIA IN 1966.

GENERAL OBASANJO SERVED AS CHIEF OF ARMY ENGINEERS FROM NINETEEN SIXTY-SIX UNTIL HE TOOK OVER THE THIRD MARINE BATTALION THREE YEARS LATER. WHEN THE BIAFRAN

SECESSION WAS OVER HE AGAIN BECAME CHIEF OF ENGINEERS FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF WAR-TORN NIGERIA.

IN JANUARY NINETEEN SIXTY-FIVE HE BECAME COMMISSIONER OF WORKS AND HOUSING. WHEN BRIGADIER MUHAMMED'S NEW GOVERNMENT WAS ANNOUNCED LAST JULY, GENERAL OBASANJO WAS NAMED TO THE NUMBER TWO POSITION AS CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE SUPREME HEADQUARTERS.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL OBASANJO IS A CHRISTIAN WHO NEITHER SMOKES NOR DRINKS. HE IS MARRIED AND THE FATHER OF TWO BOYS AND TWO GIRLS. HE IS THE FIRST YORUBA TRIBESMAN TO BECOME NIGERIA'S HEAD OF STATE.

SINCE LAST JULY, OBASANJO HAS BEEN CREDITED WITH BEING A KEY POLICY-MAKER IN THE GOVERNMENT. BECAUSE OF HIS CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LATE GENERAL MUHAMMED, NIGERIA'S INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL POLICIES ARE NOT EXPECTED TO CHANGE.

GH/RCS